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In the face of escalating challenges such as land-use conversion, invasive species, water scarcity, and a range of other complex issues—all of which are amplified by accelerated climate change—the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service embarked several years ago to develop a broader vision for conservation.

Through a cooperative effort culminating in the 2006 National Ecological Assessment Team Report, the Service and U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) outlined a unifying adaptive resource management approach for conservation at “landscape” scales—the entire range of a priority species or suite of species. Known as “strategic habitat conservation” or SHC, it is a way of thinking and of doing business that requires us to set biological goals for priority species populations, allows us to make strategic decisions about our work, and encourages us to constantly reassess and improve our actions—all critical steps in dealing with large-scale conservation challenges and the uncertainty of accelerated climate change. This is our vision for building an organization and workforce that can successfully address 21st-Century conservation challenges.

Since then, the Service has taken significant steps to turn this vision into reality. Our ongoing commitment to landscape conservation is reflected in the Service’s draft Strategic and Action plans for Climate Change and FY2010 budget proposal, which targets funding to build applied science capacity for biological planning and conservation design—critical elements of our SHC framework and climate change response.

To ensure we’re “putting science in the right places,” the Service Directorate, in April, determined the agency needed a national geographic framework for implementing landscape conservation. Just as flyways have provided an effective spatial frame of reference to build capacity and partnerships for international, national, state and local waterfowl conservation, this geographic framework will provide a continental platform upon which the Service can work with partners to connect project- and site-specific efforts to larger biological goals and outcomes.

In its meeting August 4-6, the Service Directorate approved (with slight modifications) a map of the geographic framework developed by team of Service and USGS experts from across the country. The map defines *Geographic Areas* that provide a spatial frame of reference for building and targeting science capacity that will support the Service and partners in planning and designing conservation strategies at landscape scales. It also allows us to more precisely explain to partners, Congress, and the American public why, where and how we target conservation resources and how our science-based efforts connect to a greater whole.

During the next 12-18 months, the Service will work with employees and our partners to consider necessary refinements to the framework. Specifically, the Directorate Deputies Group will provide recommendations on how to incorporate marine ecosystems into the geographic framework and define a structured, criteria-driven process to consider and recommend any needed refinement in the framework based on employee and partner input.

The Service will use the framework as a base geography to locate the first generation of

Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCCs) and in planning a second generation of LCCs during the FY 2011 budget formulation process. LCCs are conservation-science partnerships between the Service, federal agencies, states, tribes, NGOs, universities, and other entities. They are fundamental units of planning and science capacity to help us carry out the functional elements of SHC—biological planning, conservation design, conservation delivery, monitoring, and research—and inform our strategic response to accelerated climate change.

Finally, I recognize that failed reorganizations and fleeting initiatives of the past fuel caution and even skepticism about SHC and landscape conservation. So, I want to emphasize this isn't about organizational charts or who's the boss. There is, in no way, any discussion of regional or programmatic reorganization or change in budget structure associated with any aspect of SHC or the geographic framework. We are simply trying to define a base geography to help us effectively and methodically build scientific and technical capacity that will support landscape-scale conservation and our field structure.

To keep you informed of these recent developments, a general summary of the geographic framework and related maps are available on the Service's SHC Intranet site at <https://intranet.fws.gov/region9/scienceadvisory/shc/index.html>

We are also developing specific internal and external outreach strategies, actions and products (including a comprehensive list of frequently asked questions that address specific issues of interest to employees and managers) to inform and educate our workforce, Congress and partners about the geographic framework and its role in advancing our SHC and climate efforts. These materials will be distributed and posted on the SHC Intranet site in the weeks ahead.

The Directorate's decision to approve a national geographic framework is the latest in a series of progressive steps that will have a profound impact on the way the Service does business—allowing us to be ever more strategic when working with our partners and applying our resources. We've established the playing field, and in the coming months we will be focusing on specific efforts to put science in the right places for the fish and wildlife resources we care about. As your Director, I am proud to lead the world's greatest conservation organization during this pivotal time in our agency's history. I thank you for the hard work you do each day and for your commitment to helping us build an agency and a workforce that will lead our nation in addressing the conservation challenges of the 21st Century.